

## Article

# Food Tourism in Indigenous Settings as a Strategy of Sustainable Development: The Case of *Ilex guayusa* Loes. in the Ecuadorian Amazon

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on how to enhance food tourism in emerging, tropical countries characterized by a large number of indigenous groups and a high biodiversity. A sacred plant for the Kichwa indigenous communities labelled *Ilex guayusa* Loes. (Araliaceae) is used as a case study. Twelve recorded interviews with different stakeholders of the Amazon region of Napo in Ecuador were analysed. The results of this qualitative research show that the Western-based theory on niche tourism based on experiential and intimacy theory is compatible with four principles which are related to the cosmovision (worldview) of Kichwa indigenous groups, namely: mutual learning, empowerment, regulated access to intellectual property and community legislation. The framework proposed seems suitable to understand food tourism in an indigenous setting. Furthermore, the integration of Western-based food tourism with an indigenous cosmovision might contribute to a more sustainable land use and more equitable social development.

**Keywords:** food tourism; indigenous communities; ancestral knowledge; guayusa; biodiversity; Kichwa

## 1. Introduction

Special-interest tourism like rural-, eco-, and ethno-cultural tourism is a well-accepted form of land use that may be compatible with the conservation of local biological and cultural diversity [1]. This holds particularly true for tropical environments where, for instance, high rates of annual precipitation erode soil nutrients [2] resulting in reduced food production and life quality [3]. Indeed, land use such as low-scale tourism, which depends on the existence of forests and multi-species agroforests, is a more sustainable alternative compared to land uses such as mining, oil extraction, and monoculture, which require high levels of deforestation with harmful consequences for the local environment and cultures.

Developing countries like Ecuador that host areas with high levels of both biological and cultural diversities consider tourism as part of their efforts in sustainable development [4]. Many tourists visit remote regions like the Amazon in order to witness the relationships between indigenous peoples and nature. Still, the arrival of outsiders may alter normal life in the Amazon. Tourism-generated challenges range from the arrival of tourists interested in drugs (see Prayag et al. for a review of the literature on Ayahuasca-tourism [5]), to concerns by host populations seeking to keep their customs away

from what they consider a potential “prostitution” of their cultural and natural values [6]. Against this background, the global success of food tourism both in well-established [7] and in indigenous settings [8] appears less harmful and, especially in those cases where indigenous people have control of their tourist offers [9], can be a successful tool for regional development.

Following global food tourism trends [10] the unique attributes of the Ecuadorian Amazon are being recognized locally and used by the Ecuadorian government to invest in this particular type of tourism in the Amazonian rainforest, a region with more than 12 indigenous tribes [11,12].

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on how to enhance sustainable development in emerging, tropical countries through food tourism. Thus, the focus of the current work is on setting up strategies aimed at increasing small-scale commercialization of Amazonian plants (in opposition to local monoculture trends) and social entrepreneurship among those indigenous groups interested in building gastronomic operations focused on Amazonian food.

For the purpose of assessing the pros and cons of food tourism for peoples of the Amazon, we have chosen one, locally well accepted species deeply related to the intimacies of the indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon: a tree commonly named guayusa, waysa or wayusa whose scientific name is the above-mentioned *Ilex guayusa*.

Within this focus, the main aim of this paper is to answer the following questions as follows:

- (1) What importance can food tourism have for countries with a large number of different indigenous groups in a highly biodiverse environment?
- (2) Building upon well-established theoretical approaches to food tourism (such as the experience economy theory and the intimacy-approach), which aspects should be particularly taken into account in adapting food tourism offers to the indigenous cosmovision (worldview) and reducing negative impacts on a highly biodiverse environment?

We answer the aforementioned questions by means of a case study from the Ecuadorian Amazon, and we provide some recommendations for both policy makers and practitioners. This work is part of a broader research project focused on the sustainable development of the Ecuadorian Amazon and is conducted by a multi-disciplinary research team composed of both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. The afore mentioned inclusion of indigenous scholars in our team was assumed as part of our efforts to reduce Western biases during the economic-cultural analysis of indigenous heritage food, and to serve as an internal check to guarantee respect for ethical research principles during the whole investigation process.

### 1.1. Literature Review on Food Tourism and Marketing of Local Food in Rural Areas

Whether set in a western rural location or in an indigenous setting, food tourism is successful only if it succeeds in creating an allure around food, which captures the attention of distracted and increasingly demanding tourists [8,10].

In tourism, the experiential approach used by Pine and Gilmore [13,14] and based on the experience economy theory has become a worldwide tool for designing memorable tourism experiences in the context of food tourism [15], too. From a managerial perspective, this approach consists of the following elements: (a) provision of a theme to contextualize the experience and staging it by means of a story; (b) harmonization of impressions; (c) avoidance of negative cues; and (d) creation of material and sensory memorabilia to reinforce recollections.

Although Pine and Gilmore’s approach has become extremely popular among practitioners, criticism has been raised by several authors. For instance, Popp [16] claims that the experience economy theory is underpinned by a simplistic stimulus-response mechanism that—apart from being manipulative and ethically problematic [17]—does not contribute to any increase in scientific, in-depth knowledge about tourist perception of outstanding experiences.

To exacerbate the discussion, Stockebrand et al. [18] demonstrate that the use of stories and the pursuit of harmonization “at all costs” are not always appropriate in the commercialization of local

food, probably because “the decision to ingest something that is very intimate” [19] also requires a genuinely intimate communication technique which addresses the familiar sphere of tourists, thereby reassuring them.

This had led to the search for alternative or integrative managerial models, among which Sidali and co-workers’ experience-intimacy approach [20] has emerged as a framework that is particularly suitable for promoting local food to rural tourists [21–24]. Basically, the authors build their theory upon psychological research on love and intimacy in relationships [25], as well as sociological studies focused on the tensions associated with the process of globalization [26,27]. Accordingly, the individual response to this pervasive sense of discomfort is a pursuit of love and empathy, not only in personal but also in economic transactions [25]. Therefore, in the frame of the experience-intimacy approach, food tourists are particularly attracted to food specialties when these are promoted with strategies focused on de-commercialization and sharing, conceptualized by Sidali et al. [20] as follows (regarding “mutual disclosure”, conceptualized by Sidali et al. [20], we refer to the aspect labelled “mutual learning” in the following section, which incorporates and expands the strategy of “mutual disclosure”, originally conceptualized by Sidali et al. [20]):

*Rituals:* Practices of group consumption that consist of an intimate sharing of tangible and intangible symbols around an iconic food. The ritual cements the sense of belonging among participants of the food (e.g., fondue) or drink (e.g., tea ritual) experience.

*Coherence:* Whenever the territorial identity of a place is forged around an iconic food or agricultural product, it is important to create alliances with other stakeholders of the region in order to promote both the tangible and the intangible qualities of the product.

*Personal signature:* The handmade character of a local food, either in its composition or in its way of being presented, creates a strong emotional linkage for food tourists.

*Anti-capitalistic attitude:* According to this strategy, hosts or producers of local food that openly show an opposition to the principle of “*homo oeconomicus*” are considered more attractive to food tourists and consumers of food specialties.

*Struggle against extinction:* The scarcer a food may become, the higher the bid of attention towards it by gourmets or food tourists. This explains why “underdog narratives” [28] are widely used to promote food specialties.

*Sustainability:* Even well-established food practices cannot escape the new paradigm of sustainability-related practices. For example, conventional food labels are being altered to reflect the concerns of responsible consumers and include new labels such as animal welfare, local food and carbon capture labels. This confirms the fact that environmental friendliness and social and cultural sustainability are pervasive macrotrends both in the agribusiness and in the food tourism sector.

It seems that the approaches mentioned above are particularly suitable for the attraction of food tourists in developed countries, where they have long been realized. In contrast, for countries characterized by a high concentration of indigenous people it is plausible to think that the success of food tourism is proportional to its adaptation to and integration in the cosmovision of the indigenous population living in that territory. To this end, in the following section, we focus on the indigenous cosmovision in order to complement the aforementioned factors and contribute, in this way, to a more realistic, less Western-based (and biased) conceptualization of food tourism in an indigenous setting.

## 1.2. Food Tourism in an Indigenous Setting: The Importance of the Indigenous Cosmovision

Traditional knowledge is frequently politicized, as is shown in important streams of research such as indigenous tourism studies [9,29] or the huge literature dedicated to the constitution of UNESCO heritage [30]. All in all, the trend towards turning cultural goods into property to gain economic advantages is particularly visible in the international political arena: whereas at international tables national states with a high concentration of indigenous groups often advocate stronger protection for indigenous populations, on the domestic level these concerns are not set as a priority on the political agenda (for a broader insight on the debate about cultural property issues, please refer to the huge

literature of the research group “Cultural Property” at the following URL: <http://cultural-property.uni-goettingen.de/>).

In Ecuador the situation is apparently different: according to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Heritage Coordination [31], in Ecuador there are 1,018,176 persons belonging to 14 ethnic groups and 18 indigenous groups. According to constitutionalists, Ecuador has an advanced constitution and the concept of *sumac kawsay* (i.e., good living as a participative process among all ethnic groups in the country) has awakened worldwide interest [32]. Multiculturalism is recognized as an important, transversal axis of social transformation. In Latin American policy making, a transversal axis (eje transversal) is any process or entity articulating and contributing to the inter-relation of elements or processes across and within levels; for example, mathematics and history are to be considered transversal axes helping to give coherence to the complexities of other subjects in schools. Thus, multiculturalism is considered as a transversal axis of social transformation both by social science scholars [33–40] and by indigenous representative institutions such as the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) and the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR), which are recognized by the Ecuadorian state.

Notwithstanding these efforts in the tourism field, policy making has been ambivalent. On the one hand, the sustainable development of low-scale tourism is considered an important tool for boosting the economy and, at the same time, for decreasing state dependency on oil and on other natural resources. On the other hand, however, state programs aimed at encouraging social entrepreneurship among indigenous communities have fallen short of achieving such a goal. As a consequence, the current state of indigenous tourism—viewed under the scope proposed by Hinch and Butler [9]—tends to remain in a stage of “culture dispossession”, where the indigenous theme is present but indigenous control is still low. For instance, it is very common to see indigenous people working as labourers, but not as managers of tourism enterprises. Furthermore, tourists rarely acquire information concerning the indigenous language, customs, traditions, and the values that exist in the host community [41,42]. Prior coordination between indigenous authorities and tourist organizers only rarely takes place, and this may exacerbate feelings of frustration and anger that can occur when tourists enter particular geographical or architectural sites or consume local products that are considered sacred by the indigenous people.

Accordingly, we propose some aspects to be taken into account in order to make these encounters more symmetrical and beneficial in terms of the preservation and valorisation of the indigenous cosmovision:

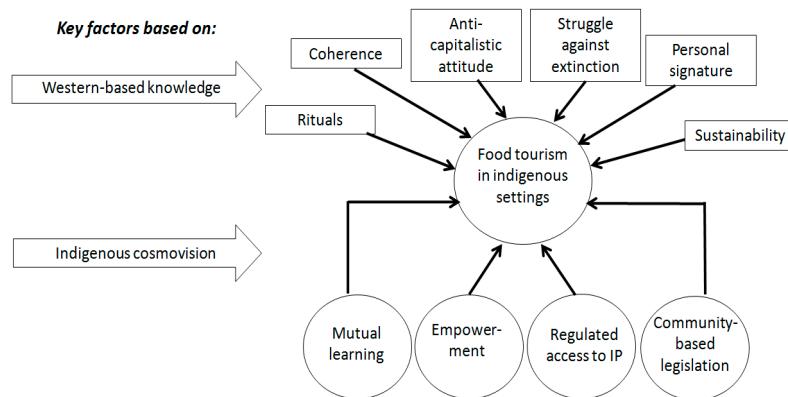
*Mutual learning as an explicit goal of the tourist encounter:* Ancestral manifestations and life traditions of indigenous people, such as the minka (community work) or sun and moon raymikuna (celebrations) among the Kichwa indigenous groups, have survived both colonialism and globalization. Indigenous values such as amallulla (do not lie), amakilla (do not be lazy), and amashwa (do not steal) forge Kichwas’ identity [42]. The outcome of tourist encounters with indigenous people should thus be mutual learning of different cultures based on shared experiences in a specific place and time.

*Empowerment:* Very often indigenous personnel are used as tourist service providers, for instance in food preparation or excursions in the forest whilst they almost completely lack roles in the administrative-managerial area. A successful, culturally diverse tourist encounter should provide an active role to indigenous hosts, including welcoming tourists personally, sharing accommodation in family homes, engaging in family and community activities, and equally distributing benefits to the whole community.

*Regulated access to Intellectual Property (IP):* Special attention should be given to confidential information shared by indigenous people and tourists. Thus, similarly to what happens in the case of scientific tourism, indigenous people should be made aware of the consequences of revealing their knowledge to tourists. Likewise, the latter should come to realize the value of their encounter in terms of enriching their knowledge.

**Community-based legislation:** To attain the goals of mutual learning while empowering locals, community-based legislation should be applied. As is already the case in other countries (see, for instance, the anthropological study of Pereiro [43] on Guna tourism in Panama), it is often necessary to organize contingents of visitors to preserve the environment and avoid culture shock in the community. Furthermore, it is plausible to think of linguistic and cultural preparation for tourists prior to their visit to indigenous sites.

Based on the above, Figure 1 presents our framework based on both the Western-based approach to food tourism in rural areas as well as the indigenous cosmovision.



**Figure 1.** Framework of the current analysis.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Case Selected: The Guayusa as Iconic Product of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Napo Region)

The evergreen, preeminently human-planted shrub, or small-tree *Ilex guayusa* Loes. (hereafter guayusa), belongs to the Aquifoliaceae family—a worldwide family including holly, “mate” (*Ilex paraguensis* A.St.-Hil.), and more than 50 other drinkable and medicinal plants [44,45]. Guayusa contains very high concentrations of caffeine, theobromine and other commercially known stimulants [46,47].

Unlike its sister species mate, guayusa does not have a bitter flavour. As well as mate, guayusa is a South American species used to prepare a hot drink. However, whereas mate is native and popularly drunk in Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina [48], guayusa is mainly produced and consumed in Eastern Ecuador, Peru and Colombia [46], where the plant is reported to occur from 200 to 2000 m above sea level along the Amazonian piedmont of the Andes and contiguous Amazon. This area comprises some 12 cultural-linguistic groups including lowland Kichwa, Shuar and Achuar [12], so the plant and its uses are related to the very attractive area of the Amazon where biological and cultural diversities are very high. After two years of living in the Amazonian region of Napo, we observed that guayusa is consumed on a regular basis by the indigenous communities and the so-called “mestizos” both at home and in most restaurants.

Archaeological evidence suggests that guayusa was also exported to the Bolivian highlands. Grave goods in the tomb of a Tiwanaku period shaman (400–800 A.D.) in Niñokorin included leaves of *Ilex guayusa* suggesting vigorous cultural contact between the regions of the Amazonian piedmont and the high Andes thanks to the Kalawaya people remaining even today [49]. Jesuit missionaries initially considered guayusa as an evil, but started to sell it as a medicine at very high prices to city dwellers in Quito [50] (see also [51] for an in-depth review of the history of guayusa). The drink is widely consumed by Kichwa people in the Ecuadorian Amazon for ritual purposes. For instance, at 3 a.m. all community members come together to drink guayusa. This ritual serves to interpret dreams and to introduce children into the legacy of their ancestors [47,52]. The Achuar drink vast quantities of guayusa as an emetic for purifying themselves [46]. All this implies that guayusa deeply

belongs to indigenous identity, cosmovision, functioning (as a means for connecting to one another), and preservation of their cultural heritage—while being a tasty beverage as well.

Since guayusa is so important for the everyday life of indigenous communities, Kichwas produce the plant in home gardens [53] where the leaves can be easily taken home and then processed and used. The production of guayusa is also part of the chakra agroforestry system [53]. Chakra is a swidden, slash and mulch agroforestry system starting with species like corn (*Zea mays* L., Poaceae) and beans (*Phaseolus* spp.); yet focusing on perennial plants like cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz, Euphorbiaceae), bananas and plantains (*Musa* spp.), chonta (*Bactris gasipaes* Kunth, Arecaceae) and other species used for food, medicine, wood, and variant uses, besides cash crops like cacao (*Theobroma cacao* L., Sterculiaceae) and guayusa. The latter is sold both to companies and in the local markets of cities like Tena [52,53]. Milled guayusa bags and beverages containing guayusa are being industrially produced to be sold in countries like Canada and the US and even via the Internet.

As a result of all described processes, the guayusa-related landscape includes an array of options for visitors to explore: from gardens and chakras to (semi)monoculture systems; from homes and villages to restaurants and cities; from native peoples with their own languages to Spanish-speaking people; from ritual guayusa to a refreshing beverage. The main area where these processes are played out is surrounded by tropical rainforest, farms and rivers. All these are enriched by the history of the guayusa plant—which is clearly related to the history of the Amazon, and its relation to the Andes. Last but not least are the flavour and health benefits for anyone drinking guayusa. By means of tourism, villagers can take advantage of the guayusa heritage; the challenge is to do so while keeping guayusa-related land use transformations in harmony with the preservation of nature and the culture of the area (see also [54]).

## 2.2. Methodology

In order to explore the key factors in the promotion of food tourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon a grounded theory approach was selected focusing on actors belonging to different cultures, i.e., indigenous communities and mestizos. Essentially, in the grounded theory, concepts and relationships between concepts are generated from data, and constantly re-developed through permanent comparison with additional data [55]. We have chosen the grounded theory approach because of the exploratory nature of the study in order to enhance our chances of obtaining an understanding of the indigenous cosmovision from an inside perspective. In the initial phase of our study, secondary literature was collected, such as: photographs, documents provided by policy-makers, tourism brochures, and other sources (Table 1). The second phase of the analysis was based on two main strategies: participant observation and in-depth interviews with different types of key informants (see below).

The combined use of qualitative and ethnographic techniques is common in grounded studies where a strong deal of flexibility rather than strict rules is necessary to adapt to the indigenous setting and to the new information gathered during the fieldwork [56,57]. A semi-structured interview schedule was divided into four main themes: general knowledge on guayusa, consumption habits, consumption reasons and method of preparation.

The interviews varied in length from forty-five minutes to seven hours, in accordance with the context in which the interviews took place. For instance, in some cases, the authors were hosted at the interviewees' accommodation for a couple of days, in other cases, the interviews were held during a guayusa *minkas* (the collective help in harvesting or building any kind of family-based or village facility) and the interviewers were actively participating in community work.

**Table 1.** Principal sources of information during this study.

Source	Description	Examples of the Sources
Graphic or written		
Photo	Hand-written flip-chart	Workshop organized by the local government and others NGOs (e.g., FAO) with indigenous and non-indigenous participants
Photo	People processing leaves and different stages and methods of leaf-processing	Own pictures
Printed report	Guayusa management plan	Management model of one of the biggest guayusa companies
Printed report	Study of chakras	Germany's Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)
Printed reports	Scientific literature on guayusa	3 PhD and 3 MSc dissertations, and 24 papers in peer-reviewed journals and books
Printed reports	3 books and booklets on medicinal and food plants	Indigenous authors
Product labels	Description of products sold in shops and supermarkets	Two different enterprises
Hand-written	Hand-written notes	Field diaries written after interviews and indigenous ceremonies (see below)
Online materials	Blogs and websites	5 Articles telling stories about guayusa
Event (participant observation)		
Public event (Minka)	The collective help in harvesting or building any kind of family-based or village facilities	Guayusa minka at the home of one of the interviewees
Religious event (Limpia)	Regeneration ceremony during which, among other plants, guayusa is also employed	Active participation in the regenerating ceremony organized by the "curandero" of the village
Public event	Guided-tours organized by operators of eco-tourism	Visit of the village of two interviewees
Public events	Ad-hoc workshops on guayusa	A seminar on bio-economy with products of the Ecuadorian forest and a tourism conference organized by Archidona tourism steering committee

The interview sample consisted of twelve people, of both Kichwa and mestizo origin. To gain as rich a range of data as possible, the sample encompassed a wide range of informants namely farmers, entrepreneurs, natural medicine teachers, regional government politicians, and local FAO office representatives (see Table 2).

All in all, the primary data collected were in the forms of recorded interviews and field diaries, which contain information on social activities such as guided tours, walks, etc. The field diary was used to increase understanding from the interviews, as well as for finding further key informants. Notes were taken informally either during the attendance of political meetings, or immediately after to respect the indigenous sensitivities such as in the case of indigenous ceremonies, like *limpias* (regeneration rituals), and *minkas*. The fieldwork was conducted in Ecuador in the Amazonian Region of Napo during the period from August 2015 to April 2016, as part of a wider research project labelled "Value creation along the agroindustrial chain of *Ilex guayusa* Loes.: feasibility study of protection as a denomination of origin and further uses in food and non-food markets".

Concerning the ethical implications of the study, it is worth mentioning that Ikiam, the host university at the time of research, had opened a permanent table with both the indigenous and non-indigenous surrounding community to discuss an appropriate way of distributing the benefits derived from results made possible thanks to indigenous disclosure of their ancestral knowledge, in accordance with international conventions on the protection of indigenous knowledge (e.g., the UN

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). Since interviews were taped, interviewers were obliged to obtain oral permission from the interviewee on the disclosure of his/her knowledge as well as on the communication of the uses of the results (scientific dissemination).

**Table 2.** Overview of interviews.

Code	Characteristics of the Interviewee	Gender/Origin	Language of the Interview	Reason for being considered a Key Informant
1	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Male/Kichwa	Kichwa and Spanish	Shaman (Curandero) with more than 60 years of experience
2	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Female/Kichwa	Kichwa	Representative of upper piedmont producers
3	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Female/Kichwa	Kichwa	Representative of upper piedmont producers
4	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Male/Kichwa	Kichwa	Representative of upper piedmont producers
5	Local manufacturer of chakra products among which guayusa	Male/Kichwa	Spanish	President of cacao and guayusa producers' cooperative
6	Teacher of natural medicine at the village school	Female/Mestizo	Spanish	"Formal" transmission of knowledge to the children
7	Chakra farmer and producer of guayusa of mestizo origin	Male/Mestizo	Spanish	Outsider learning about guayusa after arrival in the area. Novel ways of processing leaves (toasting)
8	Retired teacher and tourist entrepreneur	Male/Kichwa	Spanish	Close contacts with both tourists and indigenous people
9	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Female/Kichwa	Spanish	Representative of a locally wealthy family playing a leading role
10	Guayusa producer and part-time employer of a major international institution related to food and expert in the field of tourism development and bio-economy	Male/Mestizo	Spanish	Guayusa producer who also works for a major international institution related to food
11	Indigenous chakra farmer and producer of guayusa	Male/Kichwa	Spanish	Former field technician of the big guayusa enterprise
12	Former mayor of the city of Tena	Male/Mestizo	Spanish	Member of a wealthy mestizo family, yet a very fluent Kichwa speaker

### 3. Results

In this section, we will first analyse whether the above-mentioned categories of food tourism in rural areas derived from the experience-theory and the intimacy-approach are applicable to the guayusa case study. Then, we will present the case of the guayusa route project to exemplify the importance of applying an indigenous cosmovision.

#### 3.1. Experience-Intimacy Approach to Food Tourism

**Rituals:** Being not only a plant with high nutritional value and energizing effects, but also considered to be of sacred nature, the most appealing feature of the guayusa plant is its important role in *rituals* among the Kichwa population. Almost all respondents agree that guayusa is central to the awakening ritual which begins with a first sip of guayusa at about 3:00 a.m. Then, all members of the family have to bathe in cold water in the nearby river to enforce their spirits. It is only after this step that all members of the family share the energizing drink from the same receptacle and recount the dreams that each one has had. It is the task of the elders to interpret the dreams and to

give, accordingly, recommendations for the day. In fact, it is generally believed that drinking a sip of concentrated guayusa produces visions of the following hours. It is also believed that drinking guayusa deters snakes from approaching humans. For this reason, in the past, only men who were going hunting in the forest were allowed to drink guayusa. One female interviewee added to this point that Kichwa women analyse the surface of the guayusa tea very carefully because if “a white foam originates on the surface we know that men will come back home with some animals” (Interview 9, 22 January 2016). The 3:00 a.m. ritual of guayusa intake may be a fascinating event to assist in, however, it can be perceived as an unfair and patriarchal custom as another interviewee explained:

*The person who has to cook guayusa and wake up all the members of the family is the most recent daughter-in-law that comes to live in the husband's family. For me it was a nightmare to wake up every morning before three [at 3 a.m. all members have to already be drinking the guayusa] and above all to call my parents-in-law "mother" or "father" even if they are not my parents ( . . . ) I had to wake up at 3 a.m. for years (daughter of a formal shaman, interview 1, 29 August 2015)*

**Coherence:** Whenever the territorial identity of a place is forged around an iconic food or an agroforestry product, as it is in the case of guayusa in the Ecuadorian Amazon, it is important that institutions from different sectors (political, tourist, commercial, and agricultural) work together with food providers to promote the local specialty in a coherent way. A successful example is the Italian law on agricultural tourism, recommending the provision to farm tourists of foods produced directly by the host farm or, alternatively, regional foods with certified reputation, e.g., as Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) from the same region. A similar development also took place in the examined region, in particular in its capital San Juan de los dos Ríos del Tena. In 1960, the first festival in commemorating the city foundation in 1560 was launched. Twenty years later the mayor decided to stage the first festival entirely dedicated to the guayusa plant and the creation of the “Guayusa Queen” whose typical costume consisted of guayusa leaves and feathers of tropical birds (since 2000 replaced by more ecologically-based costumes as described by a recent mayor) (Interview 12, 26 April 2016). Perhaps the most efficient policies implemented by the municipality of Tena to promote both the visibility and the consumption of guayusa were the laws of 2006. Accordingly, the city slogan was changed from “Tena: The City of Cinnamon” to “Tena: The City of Guayusa and Cinnamon”. Furthermore, the mayor at that time encouraged the promulgation of a policy recommending the prevalent provision in hotels and restaurants of locally produced guayusa as a cold beverage (Interview 12, 26 April 2016).

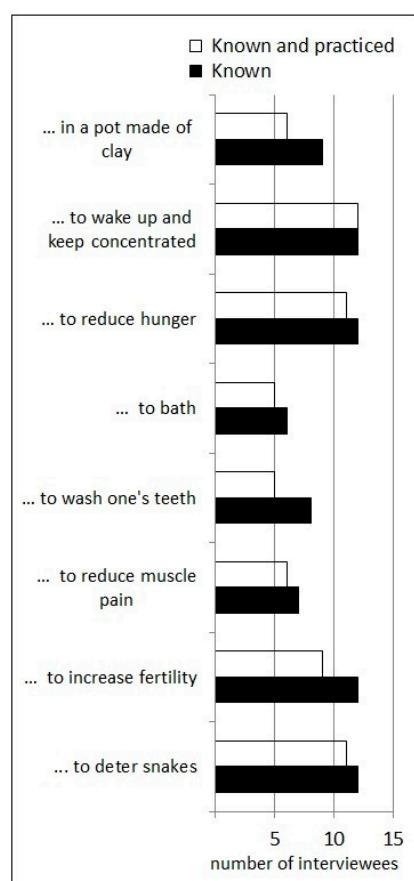
**Personal signature:** Being offered by almost any restaurant in the city and its surroundings as a cold, sweet beverage, guayusa could eventually be perceived as an undifferentiated product by tourists. In reality, there are huge differences between the processed guayusa sold by the only large manufacturer of the region, and the guayusa cultivated and consumed by indigenous people. Tourists that visit natives can tell the difference in flavour of guayusa dried naturally under the sun or smoked slowly in the cooking area, in contrast to the processed guayusa which undergoes a mechanical drying process.

**Danger of disappearance:** The bundle of traditions, cultural expression, and folklore that characterize the culture of the Kichwa natives and which is here represented by its culinary heritage, namely guayusa, is in danger of disappearance or at least of undergoing profound changes. Not only do young Kichwas refuse to speak their mother tongue, but they are also abandoning the intimate habits related to their daily culinary life. One interviewee explained that youth do not drink guayusa because they do not want to cook (Interview 1, 22 January 2016). Furthermore, they refuse to wake up early in the morning anymore.

**Anti-capitalistic attitude:** As demonstrated by several scholars, many food producers or tourist operators in rural areas in Western countries stage an “irrational” or “anti-capitalistic attitude” to reaffirm their identity in order to attract those tourists who are in opposition to the Fordist production regimes of agrofood systems [15]. Indigenous cosmovision has high potential for appealing to these types of tourists because it relies on the value of sharing, which permeates all life situations of natives: from the *minka* to the common management of tourist villages.

**Sustainability:** Finally, this category also emerged in the interviews. As mentioned before, this plant is grown in chakra, which is an agroforestry system created to “reproduce” the natural environment of the forest. However, the findings from the interviews revealed that enhanced demand of guayusa is resulting in an on-going process of land-use change. In the last years, guayusa has started to move beyond the home gardens and chakras to intensive agriculture with trends towards monoculture. This is due to the fact that at present there is only one big manufacturer that buys guayusa in considerable amounts from indigenous communities. Many of the guayusa producers explained their frustration with the situation, since this monopsony maintains extremely low prices (about 0.35 USD per 450 g). Additionally, at the time of research, the mentioned company is applying to the European Union for introducing guayusa as a novel food in the European market. This trend of guayusa towards a cash-crop displays detrimental effects both from an environmental and from a sociocultural perspective. Concerning the former, the trend to monoculture is starting to create plant diseases, which are a new challenge for small-scale producers. Furthermore, the set of materials and immaterial elements of guayusa heritage are getting gradually lost or forgotten.

All in all, the qualitative interviews give also insights on local knowledge and (new and traditional) uses of guayusa. Figure 2 sums up guayusa-related usages as documented in the literature and compares them to the level of knowledge and practice of interviewed participants. Overall, the knowledge related to nutritional attributes of guayusa scores higher than the knowledge concerning the usage of guayusa as a non-food product such as to wash one's teeth or to bathe. The interviews also shed light to the extent that the known uses of guayusa form a part of interviewees' daily life. Although 9 out of 12 respondents are aware that guayusa leaves are traditionally cooked in a clay pot (Interview 8, 21 January 2016), six of them already abandoned this habit; probably due to the decreasing number of artisans with expertise in this art and able to discover the best type of clay.



**Figure 2.** Overview of the results of qualitative interviews: Guayusa is consumed.

All in all, Western-based factors of food tourism in rural areas derived by the intimacy-experience approach of Sidali et al. [20] can be detected also in the studied indigenous setting. This means that Kichwa food providers could use some of these categories to tailor and shape their food specialties in a successful way to attract Western culinary tourists.

### 3.2. Indigenous Cosmovision

Building upon the results of the previous section, we will show the importance of integrating the over mentioned categories with the peculiarities of the indigenous cosmovision in terms of environmental, economic and sociocultural sustainability. To this end, we will use evidence of the case of the guayusa route project. At time of research, in the Napo region there were two main endeavours to organize a tourist route around guayusa: the local government's Guayusa Route and the Guayusa Trail, which is a private initiative of the mentioned manufacturer of guayusa. Both projects involve the indigenous community of Archidona, a locality close to Tena traditionally famous for guayusa production. Furthermore, both the state-run Guayusa Route and the industry-run Guayusa Trail include the possibility for tourists to take actively part to a wide range of guayusa-based activities such as: participating to the guayusa tea ceremony, visiting a chakra and tasting local food prepared according to the Kichwa tradition. Although both initiatives concentrate on trying to encourage food tourism development revolving around the iconic plant of guayusa, we argue that the extent to which guayusa tourism is adopted or rejected by indigenous actors is determined by the adoption of the indigenous cosmovision in the respective management models. Therefore, in the following, we analyse whether the categories related to indigenous cosmovision identified before (see Figure 1) are applicable to the guayusa route project.

*Mutual learning:* The stated intention of the local government is in the first place to allow Kichwa youth to re-appropriate themselves of a tradition (guayusa tea ceremony) which is gradually getting lost. Tourists' learning of the intangible elements of guayusa heritage through the active participation in the tea ceremony is likewise an important goal although subordinated to the former. This explains local government's endeavours to confer a tea ceremony which is as authentic as possible, for instance, in the Guayusa Route, all members of the three villages involved (Archidona, Cotundo and Misahualli) take part in the tea ceremony which starts at 3:00 a.m. and is organized entirely in the Kichwa language. On the contrary, the guayusa tea ceremony of the Guayusa Trail presents a higher level of commodification: firstly, it takes place only in the village of Archidona (which is the headquarter of the guayusa company). Secondly, it starts at 6:00 a.m., an hour that is more compatible with Western life-style of tourists. Finally, it is translated entirely into English.

*Empowerment:* The policy of the local government has concentrated on trying to encourage "bottom-up" development of the Guayusa Route in manifold ways. For instance, at the time of research, the individual who was responsible of the tourist department was working closely with each indigenous community of the three villages on the Guayusa Route to elaborate common strategies to valorise the material and immaterial elements of the guayusa heritage. This civil servant explained that as a native-speaker of Spanish, he realized the importance of learning the Kichwa language in order to build closer relationships with indigenous members together with the indigenous communities. The local municipality decided to include the Guayusa tea ceremony and the chakra agroforestry system in the Guayusa Route as a tourist offer able to reinforce the ancestral identity of indigenous communities. On the other hand, the industry-run Guayusa Trail displays a lower participation of Kichwa communities as only few Kichwa families scattered in the Archidona village were selected by the company to host tourists on the Guayusa Trail.

*Regulated access to IP:* Being still a project in progress, the promotion strategy of the Guayusa Route is still an open issue. Consultations between the local government and the indigenous groups have been time-consuming and complex because for both parties it is crucial to attain a fair management of guayusa-related ancestral knowledge. The long consultation tables, that include the participation of the Ecuadorian Institute of Intellectual Property, also demonstrate the efforts of the local municipality

to offer an on-going forum for the expression of indigenous' views on such delicate topic. In contrast, for the company running the Guayusa Trail the protection of ancestral knowledge related to guayusa seems to be a minor issue. In fact, the promotional material of the Guayusa Route is published exclusively in English. This seems to be inappropriate taking into consideration that the vast majority of Kichwas do not speak English. Furthermore, the promotional material is distributed only in tourist facilities, which are mostly attended by foreign tourists coming from Western countries. Finally, in the promotional brochure of the Guayusa Trail, the company published pictures of indigenous people without asking for permission. When this material was shown to one of the Kichwa interviewees from our sample, the person recognized a member of his family. Additionally, this respondent stated that a manager of the company had been invited to assist in the intimate ritual of consuming guayusa early in the morning. In that occasion, the manager had taken pictures of the family members and used them in several print media as well as in a documentary film on guayusa (Interview 11, 26 January 2016).

*(Indigenous) Community-based Legislation:* Concerning the state-run Guayusa Route, decisions such as how many tourists should be allowed to assist guayusa rituals are planned to be entirely made by the indigenous communities. Furthermore, the latter use to deliberate after internal consultations and eventually communicate their decisions to the local government. On the contrary, a review of the promotional material published by the company running the Guayusa Trail offers a more paternalistic stance on indigenous communities. In fact, the company declares that its mission is "to create livelihoods for indigenous farmers" rather than collaborating with them in achieving goals deliberated autonomously by indigenous communities. This is not surprising taking into consideration, as mentioned before, that the indigenous families belonging to the Guayusa Trail do not exert their influence through a participative process but they are selected by the company based on its own needs.

Table 3 compares the categories related to the indigenous cosmovision between the management models of the Guayusa Route and of the Guayusa Trail.

**Table 3.** Indigenous cosmovision: state-run Guayusa Route versus industry-run Guayusa Trail.

	Guayusa Route	Guayusa Trail
Mutual learning	Intracultural (older and younger Kichwa generations) and intercultural (Kichwa communities and tourists) learning	Reduced intercultural learning between Kichwa families and tourists
Empowerment	High, due to bottom-up approach	Low, due to top-down approach
Regulated access to IP	High protection of ancestral knowledge related to guayusa	Low protection of ancestral knowledge related to guayusa
(Indigenous) community-based legislation	High, due to bottom-up approach	Low, due to top-down approach

Overall, the comparison between the state-run Guayusa Route and the industry-run Guayusa Trail clearly shows that if a tourist offer avoids taking indigenous values and culture into consideration cannot be considered socially and culturally sustainable. Furthermore, it may have detrimental consequences on the environment as it is shown by the guayusa company-driven trend to monoculture in our case study. Hence, the integration of Western-based food tourism with the indigenous cosmovision might contribute to a more sustainable land use and more equitable social development.

#### 4. Discussion

Prior work has documented the growing trend of food tourism in rural areas, as well as its importance as a development strategy for territories and local communities. However, most studies on food tourism have dealt with Western countries, neglecting holiday destinations characterized by a high concentration of indigenous people and a high biodiversity.

In this article, we focused on these types of destinations and tested, by means of a case study, the factors of success of food tourism by applying the categories that Sidali et al. [20] derived by

the intimacy approach and the experience-economy theory. Thus far, we can reply to the research questions identified in the introduction of this paper:

*What importance can food tourism have for countries with a large number of different indigenous groups in a highly biodiverse environment?*

Not only guayusa, but also other tropical fruits and vegetables are gaining momentum for the globalized agri-business sector. In Western countries, the growing segments of foodies, vegans, vegetarians, and other demanding consumers are displaying an increasing willingness to pay for products enriched with innovative and particularly healthy ingredients that mostly come from tropical regions.

As mirrored in the increasing food shows and festivals around the world, this trend places emphasis on the nutritional values of such products rather than displaying the contexts in which they are consumed by locals [58]. This is particularly detrimental for indigenous people: in fact, for them, agroforestry products are seldom seen as mere food products; on the contrary, they are used in different cultural and religious contexts.

Food tourism as a process to valorise the material and immaterial elements around an iconic food could help in realigning this trend in manifold ways. Firstly, food tourism should empower indigenous communities. Likewise, farmers are increasingly considered the guardians and architects of landscape in Western countries, and so are indigenous people the guardians of food heritage in destinations with high biodiversity. Secondly, food tourism should be structured around food heritage, i.e., taking into account both material and immaterial elements of food products. As shown in our findings, the inclusion of an intimate ritual such as the guayusa tea ceremony on a tourist route may contribute to a better understanding of the cultural aspects and values embedded in indigenous culinary traditions. Such practices shed light also on the contexts of rurality and poverty where indigenous people live [58] and, ideally, help societies to transcend social barriers [58]. Finally, as a consequence of the increased awareness of food heritage and not only of food nutritional components, food tourism could give visibility to traditional cooking handicraft such as hand-made dishes, musical instruments accompanying culinary events, etc., thus helping indigenous food providers to create synergies with other cultural sectors of the society (female associations, handicraft bodies, etc.) and contributing in this way to a more efficient local development.

*Building upon well-established theoretical approaches to food tourism (such as the experience economy theory and the intimacy-approach), which aspects should be particularly taken into account in adapting food tourism offers to the indigenous cosmovision and reducing negative impacts on a highly biodiverse environment?*

Our findings suggest that indigenous hosts as well as tourists should have the sense of being part of a socially and culturally genuine experience that they both co-create, instead of feeling that they are only the actors of a commercial process. This implies that each tourist offer should be adapted to the cosmovision of local indigenous communities. Specifically, if guayusa is mainly produced in highly biodiverse home gardens and chakras, and if such gardens and chakras are strongly related to the indigenous identity [59], then a sustainable tourism model would impede a shift from traditional polyculture to monoculture. Thus, as suggested by McLaren [60], any tourism in indigenous areas should be implemented from a bottom-up approach that empowers the indigenous community and guarantees local control of resource access [43].

Furthermore, our case study identifies some strategies that can help social entrepreneurship in the indigenous Amazon to secure the “triple bottom line” of economic, social, and environmental sustainability in food tourism. For instance, tropical indigenous peoples are recognized as practitioners of a strategy of diversified use of the available resources [61]. Accordingly, any tourism should be proposed as just one of such multiple activities and should be kept “small in scale”. The case of the Ecuadorian Huaorani, who live only some few thousand miles away from our study region, represents

best practice: although Huaorani community-based tourism generates incomes twice as high as those of the oil company workers [62], resources have not been depleted since Huaorani receive only a restricted contingent of tourists yearly in their territories.

Community-based codes of conducts are another way to reinforce such best practice as the aforementioned ones. As shown by indigenous-driven research, such codes could be beneficial both to the indigenous host-communities as well as to tourists. For instance, Holmes et al. [63] explain that a tourism code of conduct could serve as an expression of self-determination [63], thereby enhancing appropriate behaviour on the part of tourists [63] and mutual learning. Ultimately, all these strategies contribute to more sustainable land use and more equitable social development, thus turning indigenous tourism encounters into a mutually enriching experience.

## 5. Conclusions

Tourism in general, and food tourism in particular, are gathering importance around the world and this trend also includes destinations rich in indigenous communities and in biodiversity.

Furthermore, Western-based factors of food tourism derived by the experience-intimacy approach have been detected also in indigenous settings. However, the study reveals the importance of integrating these factors with the peculiarities of indigenous cosmovision, such as the active promotion of mutual learning, community empowerment, restricted access to intellectual property (e.g., ancestral knowledge), and community-based legislation. Taking everything into account, the study reaffirms the importance of food tourism worldwide, and at the same time it deepens the understanding of indigenous expectations towards this tourist field in emerging countries.

Based on a case study with a small sample, the findings of this research are limited to the study context. Henceforth, future research could try to replicate the identified categories of indigenous cosmovision using a quantitative study design. Furthermore, an important implication for future research in tourism marketing science is to adopt a wider multidisciplinary approach to reach a more realistic and less Western-biased understanding of food tourism in developing and emerging economies, which is also important for policy makers around the world.

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

IP	Intellectual Property
ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PDO	Protected Denomination of Origin
UNASUR	Unión de Naciones Suramericanas
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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